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## CONCERNING GLAPTHORNE'S WIT IN A CONSTABLE

The issue of *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* for April, 1914, contains (pages 299-304) an article entitled "Some Notes on Henry Glapthorne's *Wit in a Constable*," by Professor J. Q. Adams, Jr. Readers of Glapthorne will necessarily be interested in these notes, textual and miscellaneous, particularly in those of the textual notes which Professor Adams found in a copy of the first edition of this play and which he believes were entered by a contemporary who was familiar with the lines and possibly with the stage representation of the play.

By comparison of his first edition of *Wit in a Constable* with Pearson's reprint of Glapthorne, Professor Adams makes clear the untrustworthy character of Pearson's text. He also suggests several emendations of faulty passages that Pearson carelessly failed to better. Two of his emendations, however, are unhappily made. *In re* page 175, line 22, of Pearson's reprint, he would change "whose these?" to "who're these?" The former of these readings, which is equivalent to "who is these?", is presumably the correct reading, as it accords with Elizabethan grammar; compare "theres many varlets," p. 230, l. 8, and "theres those that can examine you," p. 230, l. 6. *In re* p. 223, l. 14, he would change the question, "How's that?", from Busie to Valentine. This emendation is obviously incorrect, because "How's that?" is a tag expression of Busie and is so used in every scene in which Busie has a part; see pages 200, 210, 211, 212, 218, 227, 228, 229, 231, 232, 235, 237, 238, 240, and the epilogue, 241.

Some other distinct mistakes in the text are not noted either by the early annotator quoted by Professor Adams or by the latter himself.

P. 206, l. 16, the stage direction, "Sings," should, for clearness, read "Formall sings."

P. 206, l. 16, the speech, "Tis very odoriferous," should be taken from Formall and run in with Covet's speech next following.

P. 209, l. 4, for "does needs" read "does need."

P. 216, l. 15, for "fright" read "frighted."

P. 218, l. 5, for "Bride" read "Bride's."

P. 225, l. 18, for "*Men. [dwell] 3 Wat. [ch]*" read "*Men. 2 Wat.*"

P. 225, l. 21, for "2 Wat." read "3 Wat."

P. 225, l. 22, for "Mandivell" read "Mendwell."

P. 229, l. 19, for "4 Wat. With all our hearts. *Omnes*," read "*Omnes*. With all our hearts."

P. 236, stage direction, for *Luce* read *Grace*.

P. 237, l. 22, for "when" read "whom."

P. 239, l. 6, for "Bid" read "But."

P. 239, l. 7, for "you" read "your."

P. 240, l. 6, after "at" supply "it."

Professor Adams's conjecture, among his miscellaneous notes, that Glapthorne was a Cambridge man is of only slight probability. That the minor character, Jeremy Holdfast, a gull, a hoodwinked lover, and an object of caustic satire, is a Cambridge student is evidence rather against than for such a conjecture. Moreover, the unfledged university man, unlearned in the ways of the world, is a stock figure in the Elizabethan comedy of manners; for example, in Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* and *Michaelmas Term*, Fletcher's *Wit at Several Weapons*, and Shirley's *The Lady of Pleasure* and *The Witty Fair One*. Glapthorne borrowed much from all three of his greater fellow-dramatists; he may well have borrowed this character also.

The closing decade of the Elizabethan drama was a time of eclecticism and a time of borrowing. Even in this period, Glapthorne was conspicuous as a borrower and combiner of dramatic devices and materials that had already won approval. Almost every important device and even almost every point of plot used in his plays can be found in earlier plays, usually those of Jonson, of Middleton, of Shirley, or of the Fletcher cycle. Probably no other contemporary dramatist shows so little inventive power.

*Wit in a Constable* is built on the same plan as Shirley's excellent comedy, *The Witty Fair One*. The plot is concerned mainly with the rivalry for two young women of a London alderman's household, in which the contestants are, on the one hand, two young gallants and, on the other, two wealthy gulls who have the support of the alderman. This motive was popular throughout the course of the Elizabethan comedy of manners. Shirley was especially given to the use of it as a central theme.<sup>1</sup> Glapthorne himself uses it in *The Hollander* and *The Lady Mother* as well as in *Wit in a Constable*. Again, the befooled gulls both in *Wit in a*

<sup>1</sup> See *The Witty Fair One*, *Love Tricks*, *Love in a Maze*, *The Brothers*.

*Constable* and *The Hollander*, contrary to their intention, marry women of lower station. This solution will be recognized as common in the realistic comedies of Middleton, Fletcher, Shirley, and their followers. Other familiar material is seen in the satirically treated figures of Busie, the constable, and his four Puritan watchmen. These characters seem to be lineal descendants of Dogberry and Verges, though satire of the city watch appears frequently in Elizabethan realistic comedy.

Glapthorne's poverty of invention is apparent not merely in his extensive borrowings but also in his repetitions. This characteristic may wholly or partly explain the striking repetition of characters and even of names that impressed Professor Adams in Glapthorne's different plots. Images and lines are also repeated from play to play. As Mr. A. H. Bullen has said,<sup>2</sup> "Anyone who has had the patience to read the plays of Glapthorne cannot fail to be amused with the bland persistence with which certain passages are reproduced in one play after another."

The satirical reference to Thomas Heywood, which Professor Adams has been the first to point out, and to Heywood's laudation of the Company of Drapers in 1639, is probably, in a measure, also imitated from earlier dramatists. It is a part of Glapthorne's general satire of the tradesman class of London citizens, in which he satirizes mercers, haberdashers, milliners, tailors, goldsmiths, and grocers, as well as drapers. Between *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, the *tour de force* of plays of this class, and parts of *Wit in a Constable*, there is a strong general similarity and there are apparently several definite links. The Beaumont and Fletcher play is directly mentioned on page 182, line 19, of *Wit in a Constable*. Heywood's plays, *The Four Prentices of London* and *The Life and Death of Sir Thos. Gresham, with the Building of the Royal Exchange* (the name used in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* for *If you know not me you know nobody*, Pt. ii) are prominently satirized by Beaumont and Fletcher among the plays laudatory of the merchant class. Compare the following passage from *Wit in a Constable*, page 206:

"I never liked a Song, unlesse the Ballad  
Oth' famous London Prentice, or the building  
Of Britaines Burse."

<sup>2</sup> *Old English Plays*, Vol. ii, page 101.

In the few lines of burlesque romance that Glapthorne's play contains, pages 213-214, one finds expressions like "doughty knight," "squire oth' damsells," and "valiant Rosicleer" that may well have been suggested by *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*.

*Wit in a Constable* is probably the best of the dramatist's six extant plays; it is one of the two that were revived after the Restoration; and it has been called by Gifford<sup>3</sup> an "excellent comedy." It illustrates clearly Glapthorne's habit of appropriating and somewhat successfully adapting the methods and themes of preceding playwrights.

D. L. THOMAS.

*Centre College.*

<sup>3</sup> In a footnote to the induction to *Bartholomew Fair*.